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ABSTRACT

Public relations may be emerging in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), but the preparedness of public relations professionals in the United States is minimal. In a review of the status of intercultural exchange, three levels were examined in terms of the public relations situations: (1) opportunity for cultures to make contact; (2) the understanding of face-to-face assumptions; and (3) the opportunities for training. Although the CIS (formerly Russia) has moved toward more openness, the unstable economic climate is not conducive to frequent contacts. Also, knowledge of CIS culture is minimal. Very few public relations students and professionals have a background in multicultural and/or international aspects--a national survey of curriculum revealed few courses offered. Textbooks, whether in public relations or international and multicultural areas simply do not cover Russian culture. The training for the skills needed to work in the CIS culture is relatively nonexistent. Public relations professionals and students need to acknowledge the rapidly changing world and move toward a more proactive stance on international and multicultural training. (Contains 16 references and a figure illustrating comparative differences among cultures.) (Author/RS)

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Emerging Public Relations in the Commonwealth of Independent States: An Academic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Emerging Public Relations in the Commonwealth of Independent States: An Academic Perspective

Public relations may be emerging in the Commonwealth of Independent States but the preparedness of the U.S. public relations professionals is minimal. In a review of the status of intercultural exchange, three levels were examined in terms of the public relations situations. First, 1) opportunity for cultures to make contact, 2) the understanding of face-to-face assumptions, and 3) the opportunities for training.

It is acknowledged that the CIS country (formerly Russia) has moved toward more openness. However, even with the increased possibilities of contact due to change in philosophy, the unstable economic climate is not conducive to frequent contacts. Secondly, the knowledge of the CIS culture is minimal. Very few public relations students and professionals have a background in multicultural and or international aspects (national survey of curriculum revealed few courses offered). Textbooks, whether in public relations or international and multicultural areas simply do not cover the Russian culture. One could argue that studying Asian, Middle Eastern, and European should give one insight into the Russian perspective. Lastly, the training for the skills need to work in the CIS culture is relatively nonexistent. The recommendation is for public relations professionals and students to acknowledge the rapidly changing world and move toward a more proactive stance on international and multicultural training.

Emerging Public Relations in the Commonwealth of Independent States: An Academic Perspective

Although the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) was founded in 1955 presently 800 individuals are members represent only 60 countries, Compare this to the Public Relations Society of America with 15,000 members and that alone provides one with a perspective on the lack of internationalization in the field of public relations, particularly with the Commonwealth of Independent States or CIS. Two of these 800 members are listed as from CIS.

Reviewing the membership lists for other professional/academic associations having public relations revealed a similar lack of CIS representation. The World Communication Association (none from CIS), the International Communication Association (no members from CIS listed although Africa, Europe, Japan, Australia are included). The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (a few Europe countries, Canada, Australia represented), Women in Communication, Inc (52% of the 13,000 in public relations) with only 10 representing a few countries of Europe.

At this moment the exchange possibilities and scholarship focus is minimal between CIS and the American professional and academic associations. Perhaps more accurately pictured as virtually nonexistent.

The Intercultural Relationship--CIS and America

Obviously one is not focusing on tourism here. A brief visit through an excusion past the borders of Finland is not the focus of this discussion. What is being examined are the three approaches to two cultures interacting on an ongoing basis both professionally and academically. Barnlund describes "Communication in a Global Village" on three levels:

A. Finding ways to gain entree to the "assumptive world of another culture" (Samovar, 6)

B. Identify the norms that govern face-to-face relationship

C. To equip people to function with a social system that is foreign but no longer incomprehensible

Barnlund concludes that "without this kind of insight people are condemned to remain outsiders no matter how long they live in another country."

The brief survey of academic and professional membership in existing communication and particularly public relations oriented groups suggests that this access to each others world has yet to happen. Perhaps there has been major changes in political structure and walls have fallen but the exchange among these countries has hardly seriously begun.

Obviously, through our international and global professional and academic associations, public relations representatives can access the growing interest in public relations. But for the moment the major inroads are stories

of McDonalds (teaching the CIS to smile and note interviews reveal the line is worth waiting in because your are guaranteed to get something!). And, of course, the story of how Hill and Knowlton is training the CIS in public relations.

Research--Another Litmus Test of Cultural Exchange

Obviously other than Illinois Bell, research has yet to acknowledge that Russia is now the Commonwealth of Independent States. Directories list "Russia"" as the entry. In examining the index to journals in communication studies (See Table below) the two entries on Russia (no CIS mentions) related to theatre and none to public relations.

Index to Journals in Communications Studies Through 1990

Quarterly Journal of Speech
Communication Monographs
Communication Education
Critical Studies in Mass Communication
Southern Communication Journal
Western Journal of Speech
Communication Studies
Communication Quarterly
Association for Communication Administration Bulletin
Philosophy and Rhetoric
Journal of Communication
Communication Research
Journalism Quarterly
Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media
Argumentation and Advocacy
Text and Performance Quarterly
Communication Research
Journal of Applied Communication Research
Women's Studies in Communication

However, the previous communication index does not cover a number of publications which focus on international and/or public relations. These publications include (in some instances the publisher is indicated in parentheses) the following:

Communication Research Reports
(World Communication Association)
Communication Theory
(International Communication Association)
International Public Relations Review
Journal of Corporate Public Relations
(The Medill School of Journalism)
Public Relations Journal
Public Relations Quarterly
Public Relations Research Annual
Public Relations Review
World Communication
(World Communication Association)

In these publications, public relations in CIS is not discussed or covered in detail. The few articles on international public relations focus on developing countries, European public relations, China, or the US approach to public relations in regard to another country (never Russia/CIS). Russia/CIS falls between a democratic country and a developing national. But then, also, conditions have to be conducive to the development of public relations and those conditions which foster public relations have only recently developed in CIS.

Usually trade and tourism have been the two major reasons for cultural exchanges. Tourism is very minimal in Russia/CIS and trade also has been very controlled and regulated. Perhaps now with the rebuilding of the CIS economy, the trading will be more frequent and perhaps tourism will follow.

In sum, the above review of the literature indicates that there has been little entree into the Russian/CIS culture and that there is still yet a need to identify the norms operating face-to-face.

If this first stage has not been addressed, then perhaps the multicultural literature has at least focused on the culture if not the element of public relations. However, in examining the basic texts of intercultural communication, Russian culture is addressed minimally. Perhaps one could make the argument that the Russian culture is really a mix of Asian, Middle Eastern, and European cultures with a heavy grid of political philosophy. Even with this approach the Russian culture is never referenced as an example.

Lastly, if one were to compare the America culture with the CIS culture the socio-cultural differences would be great. Although not specifically identified as such, a cultural comparison scale, one can assume the Russian/CIS culture would be well above the French-Canadian experience and perhaps more into the Saudi Arabian or Asian level. Concluding that even before we much enter into the Russian/CIS culture the differences at the maximum level.

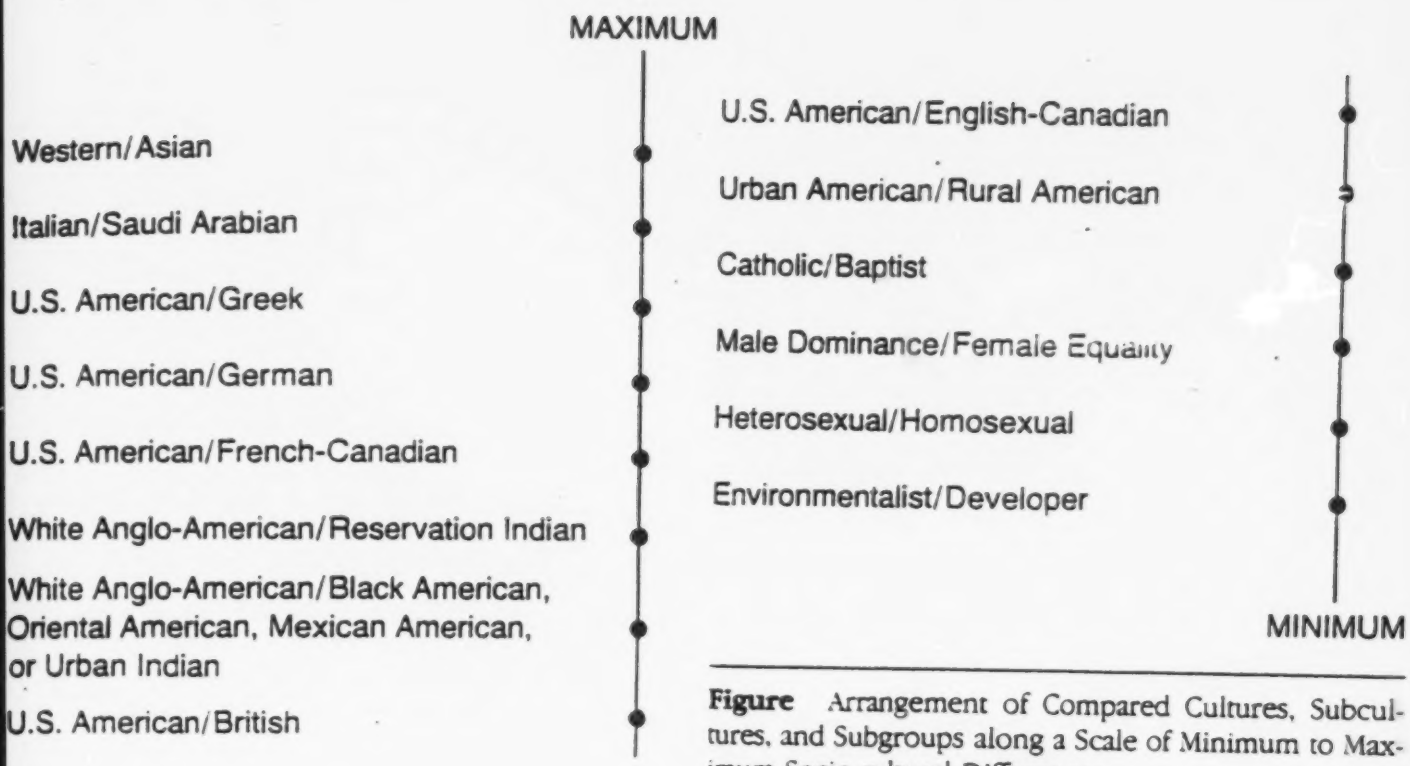

Figure Arrangement of Compared Cultures, Subcultures, and Subgroups along a Scale of Minimum to Maximum Socio-cultural Differences

Perhaps what can best be stated at this point is that due to the great change in political winds in CIS and the tremendous economic pressures, the entrance gates to this culture are more open. The variety of inroads to a culture are many, however, and all are not with just knowing the language.

Step Two: Finding Ways to Discover Assumptions

With the gates to CIS more open, finding the face-to-face norms becomes a major task. One way to discover the codes of a country is to have knowledge of that countries language. Here again is a major obstacle. The languages most studied by college students in the USA as of 1990 are the following:

Spanish	533,607
French	272,555
German	133,380
Italian	49,726

Japanese	45,717
Russian	44,384

At this point one could be pleased that Russian shows up at all on this list. As experts note in the Japanese-American relationship:

> In Japan, nearly everyone learns English in school. Here, hardly anyone learns Japanese. American movies, music, fashion, books and even food are very popular in Japan, but very few Americans know anything about Japanese culture. This knowledge deficit gives Japan a strong advantage. (Kusumoto, 11A)

In the United States, Russian is the 15th most commonly spoken language. At least 241,798 speak Russian and most from the state of New York. Yet Russian does not show up as one of the four most commonly spoken language other than English in any state of the U.S. Even in New York 30.5% speak Spanish, Italian, Chinese, and French as the four leading languages after English. (Usdansky, A1)

So the language as an entree into a culture is not very present in American life. First, those entering public relations are not likely to have language skills in Russian. It seems that although the door is more open to the CIS culture, few are prepared to enter the door with many cultural insights. Thus few have the necessary assumptions about the face-to-face negotiations in CIS.

Step 3: Training

The last step after entering a culture and learning about some of the assumptions of that culture is to train those who will be working with the culture. At this point it is almost impossible to discuss what possibility this might be.

Turning to the curriculum that is available in the area of public relations revivals that there are few opportunities to train public relations practitioners for a Russian experience.

In 1987 the Commission on Public Relations Education published the standards for the field as developed by representatives from both academia and the field. The results indicate that international public relations was not one of the core required areas of study. In fact, international public relations was an optional course.

Today there is a major push for diversity on campuses. Yet this can be translated into a variety of minor efforts. In some cases this means a few courses are designated as multicultural and international. If these courses were emphasizing a more global point-of-view, rarely is the CIS culture discussed or studied. More likely the African American, Hispanic, or Asian cultures would dominate the coursework (Neff, 1990).

Recently I received a telephone call from a colleague who was interested in having my input on an effort to develop an international public relations course (Neff, 1993). The two main thrusts driving an international

course of public relations seems to be 1) economic development and 2) ethics. The first because where the power goes goes public relations. The latter because the "ethics" becomes very complex from a multicultural perspective and the public relations person must begin to have a handle on this area (yet little research has been done).

Few international courses of study were identified in a study conducted reviewing the public relations curriculum found in college and university catalogs (Neff, 1989). If so few international courses are being taught and if the resources are so minimally developed, it does not seem that there will be an immediate large training effort to gear up public relations professionals for the CIS cultures.

Summary

The research on the multicultural and international approach to public relations has revealed the following:

1. The access to the CIS (Russia) culture has been very recent and few public relations professionals have interacted directly.

2. The approaches to learning about a culture are relatively undeveloped: i.e. foreign language training. Few students study Russian.

3. Little training is taking place to impact on the CIS/US relationship. Few know the language, fewer have international courses to study these issues, and those multicultural courses offered rarely mention (including textbooks) CIS as an area of study.

The nascent contact with the CIS culture and the little knowledge and few skills developed to interaction with this culture make training a very difficult task. Training would be difficult at best if there were students and academicians who gave CIS priority. The likelihood of emphasizing CIS is very remote for the next few years. Public relations students in the United States are barely prepared for responding to the European Economic Development issues.. The EEC force is what is now driving public relations attention away from the US marketplace (Irish Consultancy).

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